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KIT CARSON

By FRANK JOHNSON, Chemawa Student

When a boy Kit Carson became acquainted with danger and learned how to meet it. At the age of fifteen years he was apprenticed to Mr. Workman, a saddler. This trade, requiring close confinement, was of course, utterly distasteful to a boy already accustomed to the use of a rifle and the stirring pleasures of a hunter's life. At the end of two years he gave up this work and sought something that had adventure in it. He joined a band of armed traders in an expedition to Santa Fe, the capital of New Mexico. This at that time (1826) was a perilous undertaking on account of the Indian tribes who were ever ready to attack a trading band when there was a prospect of overcoming it.

No attack was made and nothing happened excepting an accident to one of the teamsters, who wounded himself by carelessly handling a loaded rifle so as to make it necessary to amputate his arm. In this operation Carson assisted, the surgical instruments being a razor, an old saw, and an iron bolt heated red-hot in order to apply the actual cautery. Notwithstanding this rough surgery the man recovered.

In November (1826) the party arrived at Santa Fe, the capital, and the largest town in what was then a province of Mexico.

Soon after their arrival at Santa Fe Carson left the trading band, which he had joined when he abandoned the saddlery, and proceeded to Fernandez de Taos. In this place Carson passed the winter of 1826-7 at the house of a retired mountaineer and it was while residing there that he acquired the thorough familiarity with the Spanish language which in after years proved of such essential service to him.

In the spring he joined a party bound for Missouri, but meeting another band of Santa Fe traders, he joined them and returned to that place. Here, his services being no longer required by the traders, he was thrown out of employment. He now joined a party of traders and trappers going to Sacramento, California. Their route led them through one of the dry deserts of the country, and not only did they suffer from want of water, but their provisions giving out they were often happy when they could make a good dinner on horse flesh. Near the canon of Colorado they encountered a party of Mohave Indians who furnished them with

provisions, which relieved them from apprehension of immediate want. They then pushed north to the fertile valley of Sacramento. In this neighborhood they trapped for beaver, and Carson displayed his skill as a hunter of deer, elk and antelope.

Carson had many opportunities to explore the country which he gladly embraced, and thus he became familiar with many localities, the knowledge of which was in after years of such great value to himself and others.

On one occasion a lot of Indians drove sixty horses away from the trappers while they slept. Carson with twelve men, was sent in pursuit. It was not difficult to follow the fresh trail of so large a drove of horses, yet he pursued them for a hundred miles and into the mountains before coming up to them. The Indians supposed themselves too far away to be discovered, or followed, and were feasting on the flesh of the stolen horses that they had slaughtered. Carson's party arranged themselves silently and without being seen, and rushing upon the Indian camp, killed eight men and scattered the remainder in every direction.

The horses were recovered, excepting six killed and partly consumed, and with three Indian children who had been abandoned in the camp, they returned to the joyful greetings of their friends.

Here, while left in charge of the camp, with only a few men, Carson found himself suddenly confronted by several hundred Indians. They entered the camp with the utmost assurance and acted as though they felt the power of their numbers. Carson at once suspected that all was not right and on attempting to talk with them, he soon discovered that each of them carried his weapon concealed beneath his garments. He immediately ordered them out of camp. Seeing the small number of the white men, the Indians were not inclined to obey, but chose to await their own time and do as they were accustomed to do with the Mexicans.

They soon learned that they were dealing with men of different mettle, for Carson was not a man to be trifled with. His men stood around him, each with his rifle resting in the crook of his arm, ready to be dropped to deadly aim on a sign from the young commander. Carson addressed the old chief in Spanish (for he had betrayed his knowledge of that language)

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